

EXHIBIT B



Lebanon's PM Najib Mikati attends a news conference in Beirut, Dec. 28, 2021. (Reuters)

Lebanon crisis

Lebanon PM seeks to block judge who charged banks, documents show

Lebanon

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Lebanon's prime minister has asked the security forces not to act on orders by a judge who recently brought ~~charges against two banks~~, documents seen by Reuters showed, in what critics said was a fresh case of political meddling in the judiciary.

Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati sent a letter to Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi on Wednesday asking that the security forces "not carry out decisions issued by" prosecutor Ghada Aoun. He said Aoun's decision "constitute an overstepping of authority."

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Mawlawi also issued a directive on Wednesday, which was seen by Reuters, telling Lebanon's General Security directorate and the Internal Security Forces not to act on Aoun's orders.

Aoun has been pursuing investigations in Lebanon's financial sector since it collapsed in 2019 following decades of corrupt government, profligate spending and financial mismanagement.

Aoun said on Twitter, in response to the instructions by Mikati and Mawlawi, that the government moves represented "a total breakdown of justice in this poor country." She called it "an unprecedented interference in the work of the judiciary."

Nizar Saghie of the civil rights body Legal Agenda said the moves showed "how the fundamentals of prosecution have been turned into a 'government weapon' to get rid of the judiciary."

Mikati denied accusations of interference in the judiciary, his office said in a statement. The interior minister could not immediately be reached for comment.

Lebanon's most senior judge and other members of the judiciary have in the past complained about political meddling in judicial proceedings. The judiciary is also divided about how to handle an investigation into the 2020 Beirut port explosion.

As part of her financial investigations, Aoun last year froze the assets of five top banks and their board members, although they were not charged with any wrongdoing.

She also charged central bank governor Riad Salameh last year with illicit enrichment, in a case related to wider corruption investigations in Lebanon and at least five European countries. Salameh, who was charged by another Lebanese judge on Thursday with illicit enrichment, denies the allegations.

On Monday, Aoun charged Societe Generale du Banque du Liban (SGBL) and its chief executive with "money laundering" as part of her probe into transactions between commercial banks and the central bank.

SGBL denied the accusations and said it did not carry out any illegal activities.

Aoun had filed the same charges on Feb. 13 against Bank Audi and some of its executives. Bank Audi said the bank respected all banking laws in Lebanon and abroad.